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The Singles Mingle

By Ann Fogg

The evening, a forum of South Shore Singles, was a study in paradox. From the first tentative get-acquainted efforts over wine and cheese through the circle discussion to a wrap-up at a local tavern, we found contradictions to accepted views of life.

Recently organized in this area through the Social Action arm of Universalist-Unitarian Churches, South Shore Singles provides for the never-married, separated, divorced and widowed of all faiths a situation in which to meet people and share problems and insights.

The twice-a-month Forum meets on Fridays in area church halls and discusses some aspect of the life of a single person. It also serves as an information instrument for singles retreats and socializing.

First Parish in Norwell became involved after the Social Action Commission sponsored an open meeting with the Rev. Marjorie Sams, minister of the First Unitarian Church in Belmont and author of 'Living Through Your Divorce'. The Rev. Richard Fewkes credits the Rev. Donald Marshall, who started a group in Attleboro, for help with the South Shore group.

According to Rev. Marshall, the churches donate their space as a community service for what they see as a deep human need.

This singles group is much less threatening to many than a singles bar. It differs in focus from another major singles group which advertises as a dating center. Neither is it limited to single parents. Instead, its goal is acceptance, even affirmation of the single state.

The meeting one evening was in Norwell. There are two in August, on the 10th and the 24th, in Weymouth. Some three dozen people drove from Quincy, Hingham, Bridgewater, Marshfield, Scituate, Cohasset and other area towns. At 7:30, first arrivals were setting out cheese and crackers and opening jugs of wine and bottles of cranberry juice and ginger ale.

Entrance was the hardest. People wandered in looking uncertain, paid a \$2 donation, picked up the current newsletter, wrote out a name tag numbered one to four and helped themselves to refreshments. According to their shyness, they looked for a conversation to join or a way to strike up a conversation.

A woman was volubly holding forth. I joined the four or five around her. She was talking of adjustment to her single state and successes so far, her job, her new apartment, a recent singles weekend at Ferry Beach in Maine. She tumbled on, the hurt showing under the bravery.

"My husband says there's never been a divorce in his family. It's all right for him to do all those outrageous things, but a divorce is embarrassing!" she said.

"The weekend at Ferry Beach was wonderful. Nice people, busy with workshops and discussions."

Yet, recalling religious education camps she'd attended several years ago, she thought people had been less up tight about themselves and their sexuality there than at Ferry Beach.

The first paradox emerged. People can be more open when it's less important to them, when they haven't gone somewhere for the express purpose of discussing it.

Another young woman stood silent behind the group. Someone commented on the intricately tooled leather bag over her shoulder. "I made it," she burst. Everyone wanted to know how. She told us how she cut it from cowhide, shaped, stitched and tooled it.

Someone called to bring chairs to a circle.

Laurie and Jean, two designated as leaders suggested that instead of breaking into smaller groups we stay in one group for discussion. We introduced ourselves by first name and town. Laurie offered the topic. — positive aspects of being single.

Laurie said she realized, that when you're

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